

Gender studies

Gender studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analysing gender identity and gendered representation. It includes women's studies (concerning women, feminism, gender, and politics), men's studies and queer studies.^[1] Its rise to prominence, especially in Western universities after 1990, has been noted as a success of deconstructionism.^[2] Sometimes, gender studies is offered together with study of sexuality. These disciplines study gender and sexuality in the fields of literature, linguistics, human geography, history, political science, archaeology, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, cinema, media studies,^[3] human development, law, public health and medicine.^[4] It also analyzes how race, ethnicity, location, class, nationality, and disability intersect with the categories of gender and sexuality.^{[5][6]}



Multiple gender identity symbols stylized as the Olympic rings

Regarding gender, Simone de Beauvoir said: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one."^[7] This view proposes that in gender studies, the term "gender" should be used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity and not to the state of being male or female in its entirety.^[8] However, this view is not held by all gender theorists. Beauvoir's is a view that many sociologists support (see Sociology of gender), though there are many other contributors to the field of gender studies with different backgrounds and opposing views, such as psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and feminists such as Judith Butler.

Gender is pertinent to many disciplines, such as literary theory, drama studies, film theory, performance theory, contemporary art history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics and psychology. However, these disciplines sometimes differ in their approaches to how and why gender is studied. For instance in anthropology, sociology and psychology, gender is often studied as a practice, whereas in cultural studies representations of gender are more often examined. In politics, gender can be viewed as a foundational discourse that political actors employ in order to position themselves on a variety of issues.^[9] Gender studies is also a discipline in itself, incorporating methods and approaches from a wide range of disciplines.^[10]

Each field came to regard "gender" as a practice, sometimes referred to as something that is performative.^[11] Feminist theory of psychoanalysis, articulated mainly by Julia Kristeva^[12] (the "semiotic" and "abjection") and Bracha L. Ettinger^[13] (the feminine-prematernal-maternal matrixial Eros of borderlinking and compassion,^[14] "matrixial trans-subjectivity" and the "primal mother-phantasies"),^[15] and informed both by Freud, Lacan and the object relations theory, is very influential in gender studies. According to Sam Killermann, gender can also be broken into three categories, gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex.^[16] These three categories are another way of breaking down gender into the different social, biological, and cultural constructions. These constructions focus on how femininity and masculinity are fluid entities and how their meaning is able to fluctuate depending on the various constraints surrounding them.

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Influences

Psychoanalytic theory

A number of theorists have influenced the field of gender studies significantly, specifically in terms of psychoanalytic theory. Among these are Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and Bracha L. Ettinger.

Gender studied under the lens of each of these theorists looks somewhat different. In a Freudian system, women are "mutilated and must learn to accept their lack of a penis" (in Freud's terms a "deformity").^[17] Lacan, however, organizes femininity and masculinity according to different unconscious structures. Both male and female subjects participate in the "phallic" organization, and the feminine side of sexuation is "supplementary" and not opposite or complementary.^[18] The concept of sexuation (sexual situation), which posits the development of gender-roles and role-play in childhood, is useful in countering the idea that gender identity is innate or biologically determined. In other words, the sexuation of an individual has as much, if not more, to do with their development of a gender identity as being genetically sexed male or female.^[19]

Julia Kristeva has significantly developed the field of semiotics. She contends that patriarchal cultures, like individuals, have to exclude the maternal and the feminine so that they can come into being.^[20]

Bracha L. Ettinger transformed subjectivity in contemporary psychoanalysis since the early 1990s with the Matrixial^[21] feminine-maternal and prematernal Eros^[14] of borderlinking (bordureliance), borderspacing (bordurespacement) and co-emergence. The matrixial feminine difference defines a particular gaze^[22] and it is a source for trans-subjectivity and transjectivity^[23] in both males and females. Ettinger rethinks the human subject as informed by the archaic connectivity to the maternal and proposes the idea of a Demeter-Persephone Complexity.^[24]

Feminist psychoanalytic theory

Feminist theorists such as Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow, Jessica Benjamin, Jane Gallop, Bracha L. Ettinger, Shoshana Felman, Griselda Pollock,^[25] Luce Irigaray and Jane Flax have developed a Feminist psychoanalysis and argued that psychoanalytic theory is vital to the feminist project and must, like other theoretical traditions, be criticized by women as well as transformed to free it from vestiges of sexism (i.e. being censored). Shulamith Firestone, in "The Dialectic of Sex" calls Freudianism the misguided feminism and discusses how Freudianism is *almost* completely accurate, with the exception of one crucial detail: everywhere that Freud writes "penis", the word should be replaced with "power".

Critics such as Elizabeth Grosz accuse Jacques Lacan of maintaining a sexist tradition in psychoanalysis.^[26] Others, such as Judith Butler, Bracha L. Ettinger and Jane Gallop have used Lacanian work, though in a critical way, to develop gender theory.^{[27][28][29]}

According to J. B. Marchand, "The gender studies and queer theory are rather reluctant, hostile to see the psychoanalytic approach."^[30]

For Jean-Claude Guillebaud, gender studies (and activists of sexual minorities) "besieged" and consider psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts as "the new priests, the last defenders of the genital normality, morality, moralism or even obscurantism".^[31]

Judith Butler's worries about the psychoanalytic outlook under which sexual difference is "undeniable" and pathologizing any effort to suggest that it is not so paramount and unambiguous ...".^[32] According to Daniel Beaune and Caterina Rea, the gender-studies "often criticized psychoanalysis to perpetuate a family and social model of patriarchal, based on a rigid and timeless version of the parental order".^[33]

Literary theory

Psychoanalytically oriented French feminism focused on visual and literary theory all along. Virginia Woolf's legacy as well as "Adrienne Rich's call for women's revisions of literary texts, and history as well, has galvanized a generation of feminist authors to reply with texts of their own".^[34] Griselda Pollock and other feminists have articulated Myth and poetry^[35] and literature,^{[35][36][37]} from the point of view of gender.

Post-modern influence

The emergence of post-modernism theories affected gender studies,^[19] causing a movement in identity theories away from the concept of fixed or essentialist gender identity, to post-modern^[38] fluid^[39] or multiple identities.^[40] The impact of post-structuralism, and its literary theory aspect post-modernism, on gender studies was most prominent in its challenging of grand narratives. Post-structuralism paved the way for the emergence of queer theory in gender studies, which necessitated the field expanding its purview to sexuality.^[41]

In addition to the expansion to include sexuality studies, under the influence of post-modernism gender studies has also turned its lens toward masculinity studies, due to the work of sociologists and theorists such as R. W. Connell, Michael Kimmel, and E. Anthony Rotundo.^{[42][43]}

These changes and expansions have led to some contentions within the field, such as the one between second wave feminists and queer theorists.^[44] The line drawn between these two camps lies in the problem as feminists see it of queer theorists arguing that everything is fragmented and there are not only no grand narratives but also no trends or categories. Feminists argue that this erases the categories of gender altogether but does nothing to antagonize the power dynamics reified by gender. In other words, the fact that gender is socially constructed does not undo the fact that there are strata of oppression between genders.

Development of theory

History

The history of gender studies looks at the different perspectives of gender. This discipline examines the ways in which historical, cultural, and social events shape the role of gender in different societies. The field of gender studies, while focusing on the differences between men and women, also looks at sexual differences and less binary definitions of gender categorization.^[45]

After the universal suffrage revolution of the twentieth century, the women's liberation movement of the 1960 and 1970s promoted a revision from the feminists to "actively interrogate" the usual and accepted versions of history as it was known at the time. It was the goal of many feminist scholars to question original assumptions regarding women's and men's attributes, to actually measure them, and to report observed differences between women and men.^[46] Initially, these programs were essentially feminist, designed to recognize contributions made by women as well as by men. Soon, men began to look at masculinity the same way that women were looking at femininity, and developed an area of study called "men's studies".^[47] It was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that scholars recognized a need for study in the field of sexuality. This was due to the increasing interest in lesbian and gay rights, and scholars found that most individuals will associate sexuality and gender together, rather than as separate entities.^{[47][48]}

Although doctoral programs for women's studies have existed since 1990, the first doctoral program for a potential PhD in gender studies in the United States was approved in November 2005.^[49]

In 2015, Kabul University became the first university in Afghanistan to offer a master's degree course in gender and women's studies.^[50]

Women's studies

Women's studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to topics concerning women, feminism, gender, and politics. It often includes feminist theory, women's history (e.g. a history of women's suffrage) and social history, women's fiction, women's health, feminist psychoanalysis and the feminist and gender studies-influenced practice of most of the humanities and social sciences.

Men's studies

Men's studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to topics concerning men, gender, and politics. It often includes feminist theory, men's history and social history, men's fiction, men's health, feminist psychoanalysis and the feminist and gender studies-influenced practice of most of the humanities and social sciences. Timothy Laurie and Anna Hickey-Moody suggest that there 'have always been dangers present in the institutionalisation of "masculinity studies" as a semi-gated community', and note that 'a certain triumphalism vis-à-vis feminist philosophy haunts much masculinities research'.^[51]

Gender in Asia

Certain issues associated with gender in Eastern Asia and the Pacific Region are more complex and depend on location and context. For example, in China, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia, a heavy importance of what defines a woman comes from the workforce. In these countries, "gender related challenges tend to be related to economic empowerment, employment, and workplace issues, for example related to

informal sector workers, feminization of migration flows, work place conditions, and long term social security".^[52] However, in countries who are less economically stable, such as Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste, Laos, Cambodia, and some provinces in more remote locations, "women tend to bear the cost of social and domestic conflicts and natural disasters".^[52]

One issue that remains consistent throughout all provinces in different stages of development is women having a weak voice when it comes to decision-making. One of the reasons for this is the "growing trend to decentralization [which] has moved decision-making down to levels at which women's voice is often weakest and where even the women's civil society movement, which has been a powerful advocate at national level, struggles to organize and be heard".^[52]

East Asia Pacific's approach to help mainstream these issues of gender relies on a three-pillar method.^[53] Pillar one is partnering with middle-income countries and emerging middle-income countries to sustain and share gains in growth and prosperity. Pillar two supports the developmental underpinnings for peace, renewed growth and poverty reduction in the poorest and most fragile areas. The final pillar provides a stage for knowledge management, exchange and dissemination on gender responsive development within the region to begin. These programs have already been established, and successful in, Vietnam, Thailand, China, as well as the Philippines, and efforts are starting to be made in Laos, Papua New Guinea, and Timor Leste as well. These pillars speak to the importance of showcasing gender studies.^[52]

Judith Butler

The concept of gender performativity is at the core of philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble*. In Butler's terms the performance of gender, sex, and sexuality is about power in society.^{[11][54]} She locates the construction of the "gendered, sexed, desiring subject" in "regulative discourses". A part of Butler's argument concerns the role of sex in the construction of "natural" or coherent gender and sexuality.^[55] In her account, gender and heterosexuality are constructed as natural because the opposition of the male and female sexes is perceived as natural in the social imaginary.^[11]

Criticisms

Historian and theorist Bryan Palmer argues that gender studies' current reliance on post-structuralism – with its reification of discourse and avoidance of the structures of oppression and struggles of resistance – obscures the origins, meanings, and consequences of historical events and processes, and he seeks to counter current trends in gender studies with an argument for the necessity to analyze lived experiences and the structures of subordination and power.^[56] Authors Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge propose that the attempt to make women's studies serve a political agenda has led to problematic results such as dubious scholarship and pedagogical practices that resemble indoctrination more than education.^[57]

Rosi Braidotti (1994) has criticized gender studies as "the take-over of the feminist agenda by studies on masculinity, which results in transferring funding from feminist faculty positions to other kinds of positions. There have been cases... of positions advertised as 'gender studies' being given away to the 'bright boys'. Some of the competitive take-over has to do with gay studies. Of special significance in this discussion is the role of the mainstream publisher Routledge who, in our opinion, is responsible for promoting gender as a way of deradicalizing the feminist agenda, re-marketing masculinity and gay male identity instead."^[58] Calvin Thomas countered that, "as Joseph Allen Boone points out, 'many of the men in the academy who are feminism's most supportive 'allies' are gay,'" and that it is "disingenuous" to ignore the ways in which mainstream publishers such as Routledge have promoted feminist theorists.^[59]

Gender studies, and more particularly queer studies within gender studies, were repeatedly criticized by the Vatican. Pope Francis spoke about "ideological colonization",^[60] saying that "gender ideology" threatens traditional families and fertile heterosexuality. France was one of the first countries where this claim became widespread when Catholic movements marched in the streets of Paris against the bill on gay marriage and adoption.^[61] Bruno Perreau has shown that this fear has deep historical roots.^[62] He argues that the rejection of gender studies and queer theory expresses anxieties about national identity and minority politics. Jayson Harsin studied the French anti-gender theory movement's social media aspects, finding that they demonstrate qualities of global right-wing populist post-truth politics.^[63]

Teaching certain aspects of gender theory was banned in public schools New South Wales after an independent review into how the state teaches sex and health education and the controversial material included in the teaching materials.^[64]

State and governmental attitudes to gender studies

In Central and Eastern Europe, anti-gender movements are on the rise, especially in Hungary, Poland, and Russia.^{[65][66]}

Russia

In Russia, gender studies is currently tolerated; however, state-supported practices that push a view related to perspectives on the gender of those in power – e.g. law solving in detail specifics of domestic violence - were abolished in 2017.^[67] Since 2010 the Russia has also been leading a campaign at the UNHRC to recognise so-called 'traditional values' as a legitimate consideration in human rights protection and promotion.^[68]



Picketing against gender ideology and the culture of death in Warsaw, 2014

Hungary

Gender studies programs were banned in Hungary in October 2018. In a statement released by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's office, a spokesperson stated that "The government's standpoint is that people are born either male or female, and we do not consider it acceptable for us to talk about socially constructed genders rather than biological sexes." The ban has attracted criticism from several European universities which offer the program, among them the Budapest-based Central European University, whose charter was revoked by the government, and is widely seen as part of the Hungarian ruling party's move away from democratic principles.^[69]

China

The Central People's Government supports studies of gender and social development of gender in history and practices that lead to gender equality. Citing Mao Zedong's philosophy, "Women hold up half the sky", this may be seen as continuation of equality of men and women introduced as part of Cultural Revolution.^[70]

Romania

The Romanian Senate approved by broad majority in June 2020 an update of National Education Law that would ban theories and opinions on gender identity according to which gender is a separate concept from biological sex.^{[71][72]}

See also

- Androcentrism
- Anti-gender movement
- Feminist theory
- Gender history
- Gender identity
- Gender role
- Genderqueer
- Men's studies
- Postgenderism
- Queer theory
- Sex and gender distinction
- Social construction of gender
- Third gender
- Transgender
- Women's studies

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- [WikEd – Gender Inequities in the Classroom](https://web.archive.org/web/20050604083319/http://moodle.ed.uiuc.edu/wiked/index.php/Gender_Inequities_in_the_Classroom) (https://web.archive.org/web/20050604083319/http://moodle.ed.uiuc.edu/wiked/index.php/Gender_Inequities_in_the_Classroom)
- [Children's Gender Beliefs](http://www.intellinate.com/science/social-sciences/psychology/childrens-gender-beliefs.html) (<http://www.intellinate.com/science/social-sciences/psychology/childrens-gender-beliefs.html>)
- [Gender Museum](http://www.gender.at.ua/) (<http://www.gender.at.ua/>), a museum of women's history and women and gender movement
- [Gender Stereotypes – Changes in People's Thoughts](http://genderstereotype.nomaki.jp/) (<http://genderstereotype.nomaki.jp/>), a report based on a survey on roles of men and women
- [Karelian Center for Gender Studies \(Regional NGO "KCGS"\)](http://urfak.petrus.ru/gender_center.htm) (http://urfak.petrus.ru/gender_center.htm)
- [Nordic Countries Defund Gender Ideology](https://web.archive.org/web/20130530132529/http://www.turtlebayandbeyond.org/2012/homosexuality/nordic-countries-defund-gender-ideology) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20130530132529/http://www.turtlebayandbeyond.org/2012/homosexuality/nordic-countries-defund-gender-ideology>)

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- [Entrepreneurship in Asia \(http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2011/09/14/apec-2011-unleashing-women-entrepreneurship-in-asia/\)](http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2011/09/14/apec-2011-unleashing-women-entrepreneurship-in-asia/), a look at the changing culture of women entrepreneurship in Asia
- [Preliminary Description for the University of Chicago Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality Records 1971-2012 \(https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.CSGS\)](https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.CSGS) at the [University of Chicago Special Collections Research Center \(https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/scrc/\)](https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/scrc/)

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